

Call for centralized database on food recalls

Ronél Burger, head of the Food Safety Initiative at the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa has called for a centralized database that food wholesalers, retailers, suppliers and manufacturers should use when recalling any type of food available to South African consumers.

Silent food product recalls remain the order of the day in some instances in South Africa and this places the most vulnerable portion of the country's population at risk. It's the population in rural areas that are most at risk because these silent recalls don't reach the retailers and smaller traders in outlying areas at all or in time to stop consumers from purchasing the damaged product.

"A centralized database would enable transparency, trending of incidents to assist government and industry with research and ensure appropriate regulations and systems are implemented. It will also allow industry to measure improvement. In this way the majority of consumers have the potential to be reached via the various media channels, thus reducing the risk of becoming exposed to the damaged food product."

Burger says that some retailers and some suppliers are under the impression that quietly recalling damaged or contaminated food products reduces reputational risk and damage. "Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact trying to do it quietly and then being found out would be far more damaging to the commercial reputations of suppliers, manufacturers and retailers.

"We have seen instances where responsible suppliers and retailers have gone 'public' with their recalls and the public has responded positively and there has been no reputational damage. In fact consumers perceive the supplier and retailer as being responsible," he concludes.

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